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Gschwend, Thomas; Shugart, Matthew S.; Zittel, Thomas

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**Assigning Committee Seats in Mixed-Member Systems - How Important is “Localness”
compared to the Mode of Election?¹**

Thomas Gschwend, Matthew S. Shugart, Thomas Zittel²

Abstract

Committees are important features in legislative decision making. The question of who serves on what committee is thus an important one. This paper asks about how mixed electoral systems affect the way committee seats are allocated. Stratmann and Baur (2002) argue that German parties strategically assign nominally elected legislators to those committees that allow them to please their local constituents. Our paper questions this argument in light of the functioning of the German mixed-member system and the individual motivations of German MPs. We argue that the motivations of German legislators do not necessarily mirror their mode of election, and that German parties do not necessarily perceive winning nominal votes as a predominant goal. We hypothesize that German parties aim to increase their vote share on the list-vote (Zweitstimme) by supporting legislators with a strong local focus independent of their mode of election. We will test this argument empirically drawing from the German Candidate Study 2005 and from statistical data on committee membership for the 16th German Bundestag (2005-2009).

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² Thomas Gschwend is Professor for Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences at the Center for Doctoral Studies in Social and Behavioral Sciences (CDSS), University of Mannheim (gschwend@uni-mannheim.de), Matthew S. Shugart is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego (mshugart@ucsd.edu); Thomas Zittel is DAAD Visiting Associate Professor of Government at Cornell University (tz82@cornell.edu).

How do parties allocate committee seats in German politics?

Committees are important features in legislative decision making. The question of who gets to serve on what committee is thus an important one. The German case is characterized by an interactive bargaining process involving leadership and ordinary members as well. Neither Maltzman's (1995) principal-agent model nor Weingast and Marshall's (1988) emphasis on self-selection are able to satisfactorily model the politics of committee assignments in Germany.

The formal process of assigning committee seats stresses the role of the leadership of the parliamentary party groups. In the Bundestag, committee seats and chairs are distributed in a first step in proportion to the strength of the parliamentary parties (Edinger 1992; Röper 1998: 313). The parliamentary party groups then allocate "their" committee seats among their members in a second step. In the SPD, FDP, and CSU, this step is coordinated by the Chief Whips of the parliamentary parties. The CDU puts a special "panel on the assignment of committee seats" in charge of this process.³ This panel is made up of the chief whip and the chairs of the regional subgroups within the party. The final decision on committee assignments requires the agreement from the leadership of the parliamentary party (Fraktionsvorstand) first, and then from the general meeting of the parliamentary party (Fraktionsversammlung) by majority votes (Schüttemeyer 1998: 278 – 285; Ismayr 2000: 167 – 175). The role of the leadership of the parliamentary party groups is emphasized by its right to withdraw legislators from committees (Edinger 1992: 208).

³ The CDU and the CSU form one party group in the German Bundestag. Each party however receives committee chairs depending on its overall share of seats and gets to independently allocate these seats among its members in coordination with the its "sister party group".

Party leadership does not single-handedly determine committee assignments. Ismayr (2000: 167) characterizes this process instead as lengthy and conflict ridden. The informal processes preceding committee assignments underscore this very point. The personal preferences of legislators carry some weight in what is an bargaining process of assigning committee seats. The party groups aim to be responsive to the respective wishes and motivations of their members despite the structured and disciplined nature of party politics in Germany (Saalfeld 1995). The political groups consult their members about their committee preferences at the beginning of the legislative term in a formal way. It is common practice in all parties to determine the preferences of the members through internal questionnaires distributed prior to the decision on committee seat allocation. This process is coordinated by the Chief Whip in each party. The chairs of the policy task forces and the chairs of the regional chapters of the party groups also survey their members and develop ideas on seat allocation (Ismayr 2000: 174). These initial consultations are followed by quite lengthy negotiation processes between leadership and ordinary group members.

Conflicts about committee assignments can be severe. Seats are scarce and the stakes are high for individual legislators. This is especially true for large party groups where each legislator will generally receive only one assignment. Committee assignments are crucial steps in political careers, especially for freshmen legislators. They determine the ability to gain visibility in the political realm, to acquire political status, and thus to advance politically. The right committee assignment could be a stepping stone, the wrong committee assignment could put a legislators' career in balance.

The contentious processes of assigning committee seats are guided by a few informal commonly agreed upon rules which provide some kind of structure and pacify conflict. Seniority

in a given committee plays a crucial role in the allocation of committee seats and the ability of legislators to secure their most preferred committee assignment. As a common practice, committee members are able to keep their assignments after re-election if they wish to do so. Many committee seats are simply returned to their previous holder (Kaack 1990). Each committee is also made up of an equal number of “deputies”. If legislators wish to take a seat on a “new” committee, having served as a “deputy” in the previous parliamentary session generally helps their cause. We argue in this paper that the electoral system also structures the process of committee assignments by affecting the strategic goals of party leadership and party members.

What are the goals of political parties in the process of assigning committee seats? The literature on this issue emphasizes a number of answers to this question such as the aim to prevent agency loss in parliamentary policy making, the need to mobilize policy expertise in committee decision making, or the goal of satisfying social interests close to the party. This paper stresses another goal, namely the goal of winning elections by assigning the right individuals to the appropriate committee seats. We argue that the “goals” of satisfying social interests and of mobilizing policy expertise through committee-seat allocation are rather part of the larger strategy of parties to win upcoming elections. Because the electoral system shapes how voters respond--whether, for instance, they favor candidates or choose a party--and how votes are translated into seats, it follows that the electoral system also shapes party strategies, including satisfying social interests and maximizing policy expertise through the assignment of committee seats.

This perspective on the politics of committee assignments builds on the insights of a much cited article by Stratmann and Baur (2002). These authors suggest that German parties respond to the mixed-member system in strategic ways to reap electoral benefits from the process of

assigning committee seats. Germany's mixed-member system, however, confronts party groups with a quite complex task. Because votes and legislative seats are won differently in the two distinct tiers of a mixed-member system, strategies to allocate committee seats in order to please constituencies differ by tier. The task for a party is to find the right legislator for the right committee to reach the ultimate goal, namely to please a particular type of constituency.

Germany's mixed-member system generates two different types of constituencies. Approximately half of the members of the German Bundestag are elected in single-seat districts by plurality (nominal tier). These legislators face local constituencies. The rest of the seats are elected via closed party lists in a proportional voting system (list tier). Formally, these legislators face regional constituencies being elected on the basis of statewide party lists. Practically, they cater to national constituencies due to the relative ideological homogeneity of German political parties and due to the division of labor between the Bundestag and the Bundesrat, which as the second chamber represents state interests. For these reasons, we will refer in the following to "national constituencies" rather than to regional or state constituencies.

Committees in the Bundestag differ in their suitability for pleasing different types of constituents. Most committees are neutral in this regard. Some committees, on the other hand, clearly differ in the type of constituency they focus on. The committee on traffic and infrastructure is one example for a committee with a local focus. It drafts national plans specifying where motorways, streets and bridges will be built or repaired. These infrastructure projects allow the members in the committee to direct public works projects to their electoral districts to support local enterprises and the local economy. Those kinds of committees can be considered local constituency committees. Other examples that fall into this category are the committee for agriculture and the committee for construction.

Some committees allow political parties to strengthen their profile on national policies and to thus please national constituencies. Committees such as health, defense, development, and family affairs are examples for these types of committees. Legislators serving on these committees are able to become their party's representatives of a specific policy position or a policy profile in a specific policy area. The crucial question is, which of these two committee type should be staffed by which legislator to best please the constituency related to each of the committee types.

Stratmann and Baur (2002) claim that parties assign nominally elected legislators to those committees that are particularly suitable to help please the local constituency in which they earned their seat. They furthermore claim that parties assign legislators elected via party lists to those committees that could be instrumental to please national constituents. Committee assignments are thus considered to provide opportunities for electoral gains. The particular placement choices are considered to be driven by the mode of election.

This article proposes an alternative vision on what exactly parties care about when assigning legislators to either one of the two types of committees. *We suggest that parties indeed aim to please their dual constituencies in the process of assigning committee seats but that they assign committee seats based more on the "localness" of their members than on their mode of election.* We assume that parties will assign legislators with a high degree of "localness" to those committees suitable to please local constituents. We furthermore assume that they will assign in turn legislators with a weak degree of "localness" to those committees instrumental to please national constituents, independent of their mode of election. We propose this alternative vision of the politics of committee assignment for two different reasons that we wish to explain in the remainder of this theoretical section.

The motivations of German legislators firstly do not necessarily mirror their mode of election. Nominally elected legislators have no monopoly on constituency representation (Saalfeld 2008: 219). Therefore, “*localness*” *does not follow from the mode of election* (Zittel and Gschwend 2008). The frequent practice of dual candidacy is what prevents those who are elected from the nominal tier from having a monopoly in representing the interests of local constituencies. In the 2005 federal election, 1,050 (45 per cent) candidates ran in both a nominal district and on the party list. Only 434 (18 percent) of all candidates in 2005 solely ran only in one of the 299 electoral districts and 862 (37 per cent) competed only on their party’s list (Zittel/Gschwend 2007: 988). Among those elected, the percentage of dual candidacies is even higher. Manow (2007: 202) reports an average of around 80 percent of MPs that were dually listed in most recent elections.

Some dual candidates who lost their district race perceive themselves subjectively as district representatives and “shadow” the incumbent constituency representative (Schweitzer 1979: 181f.; Klingemann and Wessels 2001). This is what we mean by “localness,” which implies a strong *subjective* local focus and a desire to please local constituents, independent of the mode of election. The reasons for this kind of local focus can be manifold. The legislators concerned might simply enjoy a role as good constituency members, or they might feel close to their district because of their own personal history or because of deep reaching social ties to the district. Legislators might also attach career objectives to this very goal as well as electoral objectives if their district race is close and appears to be winnable. They might hope to win the district in future elections and to thus increase their electoral security.⁴ The effects of “localness”

⁴ Incumbents generally enjoy high electoral security in German politics. Roberts (1988) nevertheless concedes that directly elected MPs enjoy a competitive edge in terms of electoral security. Manow (2007) underscores

in committee assignment processes should be however clear cut, despite their many potential causes. Legislators who subjectively consider themselves to be district representatives should wish to earn a seat on some constituency committee.

We assume that parties will be sympathetic to the demands of “local” legislators and that they will aim to accommodate their preferences in the assignment process. We assume that this is not a matter of courtesy, but rather is in their self interest seeking to win elections in the context of Germany’s mixed-member system. The rationale of the parties’ willingness to accommodate “local” legislators in the committee assignment process flows from the functioning of Germany’s mixed-member system.

Stratmann and Baur’s (2002) argument is based upon the underlying assumption that German parties perceive winning nominal votes as a primary goal. We doubt this assumption. We don’t believe that German parties will assign committee seats *solely* on the basis of the mode of election to ensure the reelection of the legislators concerned and to claim constituency mandates for the party. We argue instead that parties are interested in supporting legislators with a high level of “localness” independent of their mode of election. The reasons for this alternative conceptualization of the relationship between party and candidate interests lie in the way the German mixed-member system functions.

The German system is a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system in which the list tier compensates parties, on a national basis, for deviations from proportionality that arise from the

this argument in a most recent analysis on turnover in the German Bundestag. He demonstrates a higher electoral security of directly elected incumbents compared to those incumbents that entered the German Parliament via a list-vote.

allocation of nominal-tier seats via plurality rule (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001). Thus it is the list vote that determines the overall allocation of seats in the Bundestag, implying that it is this vote that parties should be primarily focused on. Parties' nominal-tier seat totals are subtracted from the allocation they receive in the list tier to maintain proportionality, and thus parties are normally unable to win additional seats simply by increasing their nominal votes.⁵

It is worth contrasting the German MMP system with the other main class of mixed-member system, those that are classified as mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) by Shugart and Wattenberg (2001). In these systems, list seats are allocated in "parallel" to the nominal-tier seats, rather than in a compensatory manner. Only in the MMM variant, as used for instance in Japan, are there formally two truly independent tiers of election functioning on the basis of two different electoral systems (Pekkanen, Nyblade, and Krauss 2006).

Students of mixed-member systems emphasized "contamination effects" between the nominal and the list tier for MMM as well as MMP (Ferrara/Herron 2005; Cox/Shoppa 2002, Gschwend et al. 2003). From this perspective, mixed-member systems are perceived as a particular type of electoral system rather than a compilation of two different electoral rules. They are said to be characterized by particular effects at the levels of voters and elites.

One particular argument made by "contamination theorists" emphasizes a spill-over from the multiparty competition characteristics of PR to the SMD context (Ferrara, Herron, and Nishikawa 2005). This is the type of contamination that emphasizes the interest of parties in

⁵ The only exception here is when a given district victory results in an additional seat beyond the party's entitled share, based on list votes. This results in so called "overhang seats" (Überhangmandate). We address these cases below.

candidates and legislators with a strong local focus. The assumption is that parties choose candidates for the local districts to give themselves a human touch and to thus help their list-vote share. Their expectation is that fierce electoral competition at the nominal tier driven by strong local candidates helps their vote share.⁶ MPs with a strong local focus motivated to represent local constituencies are thus a strong asset from the party's perspective independent of their mode of election.⁷

We argue that the compensatory nature of the German mixed-member system provides a particular incentive for parties to take “contamination effects” into account in their personnel strategies and to place a high value on the “localness” of legislators in the process of committee assignments. Our argument can be pushed to the extreme for further clarification in the following way. Even hopeless legislators who will never ever be able to win their district should receive consideration for constituency committees if they are able to demonstrate “localness”. This is certainly true for small parties in German politics that are most unlikely to win any district at all. But this should also be true for bigger parties with fair chances to win nominal votes. The

⁶ In this case, the direction of spill-overs goes both ways. PR competition spills-over into the SMD tier on the one hand because the latter is dominated by the expectations of political parties aiming to increase a proportional share of their vote. The vote choices of voters spill-over from the SMD tier to the PR tier because increases in the share of the nominal-vote translate into gains in the list-vote.

⁷ Note that under an MMM system, candidates with local appeal would be desirable for parties even if there were no spillover (contamination). Under MMM, every additional seat that a party wins in the nominal tier increments its overall seat total. However, under MMP systems as in Germany, the logic for localness would be almost nonexistent without an expectation of spillover effects, because the compensation mechanism of MMP means that any additional nominal-tier seat won is simply one less list seat won (excluding districts that generate overhangs, which we address below).

reasons can be demonstrated in a short thought experiment. Consider a local candidate of a particular party that managed to increase his or her vote share at the nominal tier from 25 to 35 percent. Consider now a local candidate that managed to win a nominal vote by increasing his or her nominal vote share from 49 to 51 percent. If we wish to predict which one of these two candidates would be most likely to be assigned to a constituency committee, we would pick the first candidate. If the contamination theory holds true, large swings in vote shares at the nominal tier should translate into large swings at the PR tier and thus into increases in parliamentary seats. Legislators who manage to deliver these results to their party should receive its utmost attention.

The compensatory nature of the German mixed-member system is disturbed by surplus mandates (*Überhangmandate*). Parties receive surplus seats if they manage to win more nominal-tier seats than what would be their proportional entitlement based on list votes. Surplus seats are not compensated by additional seats to other parties, and thus they disturb the predominant role of the list vote in the process of vote–seat allocation (Farrell 2001: 97ff.). Surplus seats were considered in the past a peculiar and largely irrelevant detail of the German electoral system. This has changed with unification to considerable degrees. The number of surplus seats increased from an average of 2.75 between 1949 and 1990 to 16 in 1994. It went down to five seats in 2002 but is back at 16 seats in the present Bundestag (2005 – 2009). Declining turnout and the increasing fragmentation of the German party system are major and lasting factors behind this development (Behnke 2007).

Surplus seats represent a very small proportion of the Bundestag as a whole, and thus do not undermine the notion that the system is fundamentally compensatory, and thus that list votes are the most important determinant of seat allocation (unlike in MMM systems). However, in

close elections, even the small disturbance to proportionality created by surplus seats can have a considerable effect on government formation. The last Kohl Government (1994 - 1998) rested for example on a parliamentary majority solely secured by surplus seats. Moreover, surplus seats could lead to a plurality of seats being one by a different party from the one that earned the highest number of list votes (Gschwend 2004: 16). According to current predictions, government formation after the September 2009 elections might also be affected by surplus mandates.

The increasing relevance of surplus mandates should be one important incentive for German parties not to ignore the nominal vote and to support “real winners” rather than any “ambitious locals” who might help the party also earn list votes. We however argue that this incentive might be of greater relevance in the future given the relatively recent increase in the number of surplus mandates, but that it is not yet a major factor. We furthermore do not dispute that winning nominal votes might be a goal for political parties and that it might play some role in their personnel policies. We only dispute that it is the dominant goal. We argue in turn that “localness” is a phenomenon independent from the mode of election and that it does matter in the process of assigning committee seats in the German Bundestag.

We shall conclude our theoretical considerations on the politics of committee assignments in Germany with a final qualification. A party’s interest in supporting legislators with a strong local focus independent of their mode of election is of course dependent on the behavior of voters and on whether voters cast straight-ticket votes. To be sure, split-ticket voting is considered to be on the rise in German elections. But a large majority of German voters still casts a straight ticket in federal elections (Gschwend et al. 2003; Schoen 1999). This reinforces the parties’ perceptions that running strong local candidates and helping legislators with strong local

foci to please their local constituencies will translate in increasing vote shares at the PR tier and thus in gains in parliamentary seats.⁸

Data, indicators, and hypotheses

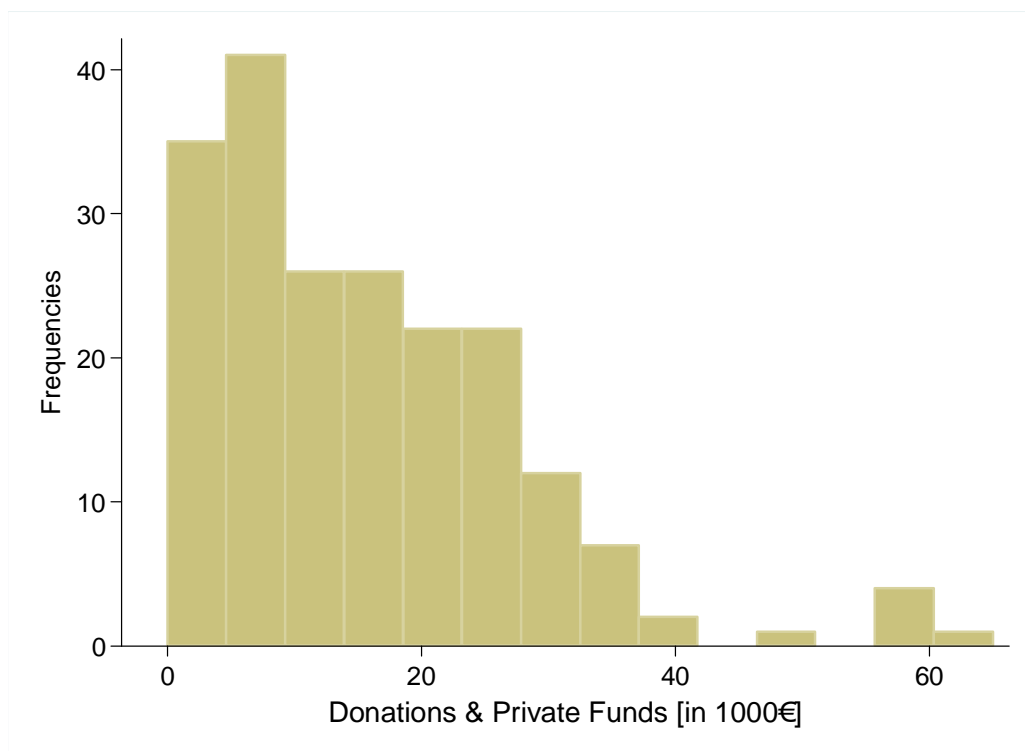
The argument made above raises two crucial operational questions: 1) What does “localness” mean in empirical terms? 2) How can we distinguish empirically between different types of committees aiming at different types of constituencies? These are the questions we will turn to first in this section.

We will answer the first question by analyzing the behavior of candidates in election campaigns. We justify our emphasis on campaigns on the basis of three arguments: 1) Election campaigns constitute “application processes” in which candidates have to communicate, in consistent and visible ways, their basic qualifications and aspirations to the voters who will decide whether to “hire” them. They are thus most useful arenas for understanding the “localness” of candidates; 2) Election campaigns are important events for political parties. Because of this importance, parties will closely screen the performance of their candidates and will draw conclusions for future personnel strategies. Campaign behavior is thus a likely proxy for political parties to evaluate candidates’ effectiveness at the local level; 3) We are able to draw from a useful set of data on candidates in the German Federal Elections of 2005 (Wüst et al. 2006, Zittel and Gschwend 2007, 2008), the German Candidate Study 2005 (GCS 2005).

⁸ For a more differentiated version of this argument distinguishing between three different mechanisms of contamination see Ferrara, Herron, and Nishikawa (2005: 68–69)

The GCS 2005 is a postal survey of all district and party-list candidates of the five parties represented in the German Bundestag in 2005 - the Social Democrats (SPD), Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Free Democrats (FDP), Greens, and the Left Party (Left.PDS). Of the 602 sitting members of the 16th German Bundestag, 220 participated in this survey. These data allow an in-depth analysis of the campaign behavior of those legislators elected in 2005 and particularly to what degree those legislators acted as “ambitious locals” during their campaigns.

Figure 1: The distribution of the local campaign budgets



The following analysis looks at four empirical indicators to measure the “localness” of legislators on the basis of their campaign behavior: 1) The amount of local money acquired for

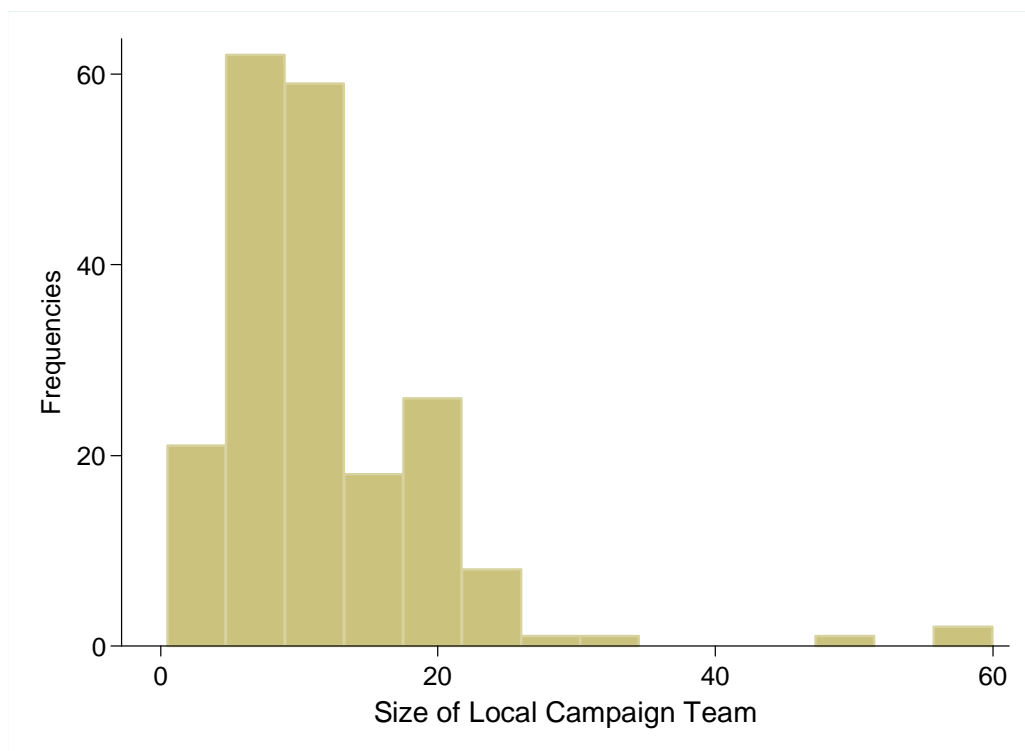
the campaign; 2) The mobilization effort at the local level; 3) The personal campaign effort at the local level; 4) The local emphasis on the campaign agenda. The selection of these indicators is guided by the general assumption that “localness” is demonstrated in the campaign context in form of particular campaign activities emphasizing the closeness of legislators to their constituents in the district. The four indicators are measured in the following ways.

Our first indicator of localness is *local campaign budget*. The GCS 2005 asked about the total budgets of legislators’ previous election campaigns. In a subsequent question we asked them about how much of the budget came from their party, originated from third-party donations, or depended on their own funds. From the latter two items we computed the overall local campaign budget (scaled in 1000€). Our assumption is that legislators are closest to their district if they are able to raise larger amounts of third-party money – mostly coming from local sources (Oldopp 2001: chapter 8) - or if they are willing to pour their own money into their constituency campaigns. Figure 1 demonstrates significant differences in the sizes of local campaign budgets in the elections of 2005. The extremes range from zero to 60,000 Euros. An average legislator enjoyed a local campaign budget of 15,600 Euros flowing either from third party donations or from private funds.

Our second indicator of localness is *mobilization effort*. The GCS 2005 asks respondents for the size of their local campaign teams. The individual answers to this open-ended question constitute the variable we are using to measure the mobilization effort of legislators at the local level. As reported in the German Candidate Study an average legislator has employed between 11 and 12 people in his or her campaign team while every other legislator was able to mobilize at most 10 members on her local campaign team. Figure 2 further shows that the reported size of their teams ranges from 2 to 60 people. We take the logarithm of the reported raw value as our

measure of mobilization effort rather than the reported raw value because we expect a nonlinear impact. Conceptually the difference in mobilization effort between two hypothetical small teams of the size of 2 and 4 should be different from the difference in mobilization effort between two equally hypothetical large teams of the size of 30 and 32. Moreover, this transformation of the raw values should also take care of the potential influence of the apparent outliers in figure two on the estimation results.

Figure 2: The mobilization efforts in the 299 constituencies indicated by the size of the campaign team



Our third indicator of localness is *personal campaign effort*. We operationalize this concept via a summary measure focusing on the absolute time spent during the last month of the election

campaign for eight different local campaign activities that are reported within the GCS 2005 such as (1) canvassing, (2) meetings with local party members, (3) visiting local events in business, sports and culture, (4) meetings with local businesses and (5) associations, (6) interviews with local and regional newspapers as well as (7) local and (8) regional radio and TV stations. The respondents rated the time spent for each activity on a seven-point scale (“no time”, “<2h”, “2-5h”, “5-10h”, “10-15h”, “15-20h” and “20h+”). We summed up those ratings across all activities and divided them by eight to get an average score indicating the average time spent per respondent.

Figure 3: Distribution of personal campaign efforts at the local level

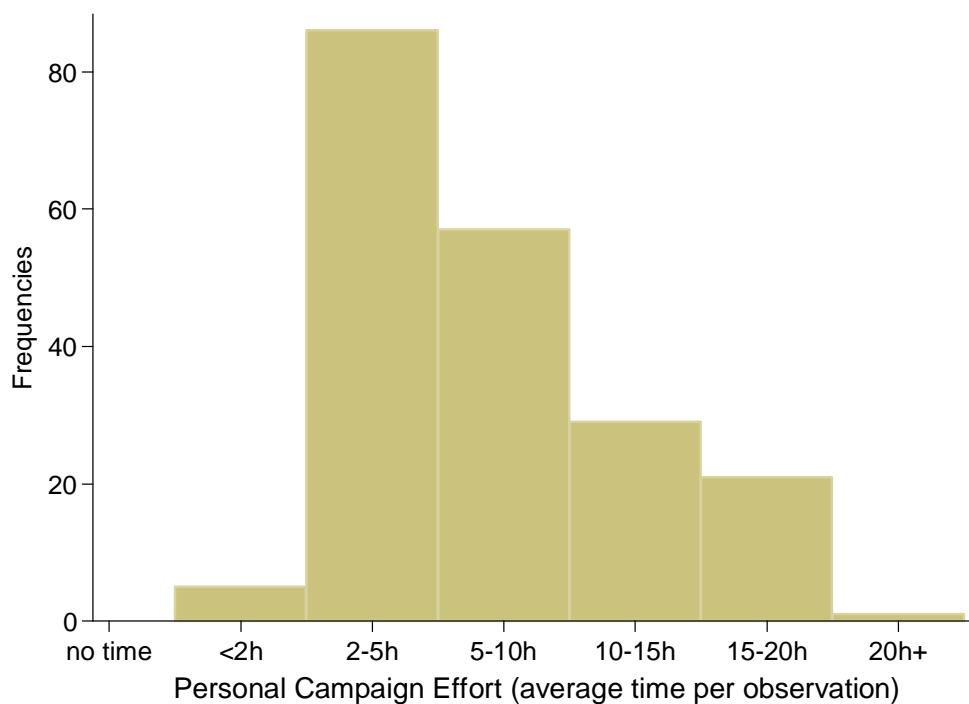
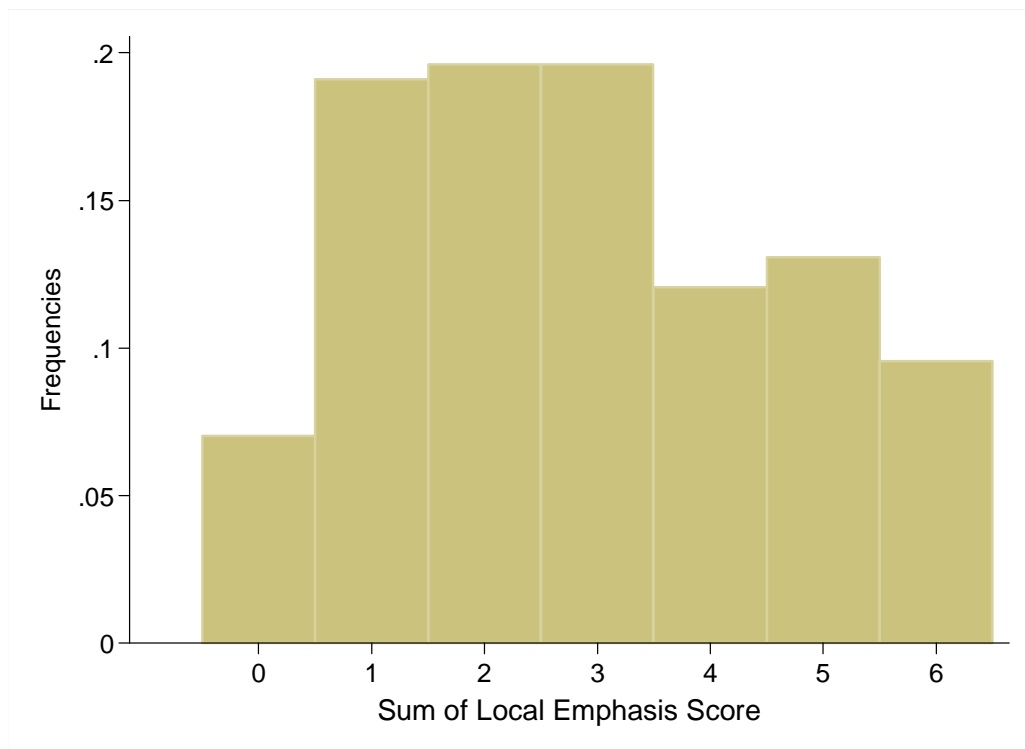


Figure 3 demonstrates important differences in the campaign efforts of legislators at the local level during the 2005 election campaign. It is noteworthy that even the most modest campaigners report to have spent at least up to 2 hours on average for each local activity. Each candidate obviously needs to pay some attention to local campaign contexts. In contrast to modest personal campaign efforts at the local level, the most ambitious campaigners spend around 20 hours on average per local activity. Most observations, however, fall within the 2-5h category. Finally, we normalized our composite measure of personal campaign effort to range from 0 to 1.

Our fourth indicator of localness is the *local emphasis in the campaign agenda*. Here we are concerned with the self-reported themes and ideas legislators' emphasized in their campaign. The GCS 2005 asked respondents to characterize their campaigns by ranking the three most important issues they emphasized in their campaign communication. Among the six items presented to the respondents of this survey the economic well-being of the district, the political wishes of the voters in the district, and the candidates' own local identity were considered as emphasizing local aspects in the campaign. We assigned three points if one of these items ranked first, two for being ranked second, and one for being ranked third. Otherwise a score of zero is assigned. Then we simply added those numbers up to get the sum of a local emphasis score for the campaign agenda. The sum can range from 0 if none of the three local aspects are ranked among the top three items to a maximum of 6 ($= 3+2+1$) if a legislator emphasizes all

three items.⁹ Figure 4 provides an overview over the resulting distribution of this local emphasis score.

Figure 4: The local emphasis in the campaign agendas of the legislators



While there are about 7 percent that did not emphasize any of the local aspects in their past campaign communication we have almost 10 percent in our sample that ran their past campaign with a maximum local emphasis. These respondents ranked all three local themes as the three

⁹ In 19 cases we get values between 7 and 9 indicating that those legislators did not provide a ranking without ties. We recoded these observations to the theoretical maximum of six. This recoding did not result in any substantive change of the reported results, though.

most important issues in their campaigns. An average legislator gets a total score of almost three indicating that he or she ranks either only one local aspect on the top or two local aspects second and third. As our independent variable we divide this score by six to let the resulting sum range from 0 to 1.

The second question raised above concerns the distinction between local constituency committees and national (party) constituency committees, and thus our *dependent variable*. How can we empirically distinguish these types of committees? In order to answer this question and construct a dependent variable for our further analysis we follow in a first step the distinction made by Stratmann and Baur (2002: 508) between district committees, “where funds can be channeled to the home district” and party committees, which provide important “group-specific redistributive functions” for a party’s national reelection success. Their typology also includes a residual category of neutral committees that neither have a clear local nor a clear national focus.

We deviated from Stratman and Baur’s typology in several ways that we wish to clarify at this point. Three committees were new and needed to be included into the existing typology. This was done in the following ways: We identified the committee on tourism (“Ausschuss für Tourismus“) as a constituency committee because of its focus on infrastructure policies to support local tourism; we identified the committee on human rights and humanitarian affairs (“Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und Humanitäre Hilfe“) as a party committee because of its focus on international issues and on the implementation of general political values; we identified the committee on culture and the media (“Ausschuss für Kultur und Medien“) as a neutral committee lacking a clear local or national focus. Therefore we had to place this committee in the residual category.

Table1: Types of Committees in the German Bundestag

Party Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ausschuss für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend ▪ Ausschuss für Gesundheit ▪ Ausschuss für Menschenrechte und Humanitäre Hilfe ▪ Ausschuss für Wirtschaft und Technologie ▪ Ausschuss für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung ▪ Finanzausschuss ▪ Verteidigungsausschuss
District Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ausschuss für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz ▪ Ausschuss für Tourismus ▪ Ausschuss für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung
Neutral Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ausschuss für Angelegenheiten der Europäischen Union ▪ Ausschuss für Arbeit und Soziales ▪ Ausschuss für Bildung, Forschung und Technikfolgenabschätzung ▪ Ausschuss für Kultur und Medien ▪ Ausschuss für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit ▪ Ausschuss für Wahlprüfung, Immunität u. Geschäftsordnung ▪ Auswärtiger Ausschuss ▪ Haushaltsausschuss ▪ Innenausschuss ▪ Petitionsausschuss ▪ Rechtsausschuss ▪ Sportausschuss

The German Bundestag provides official statistics about legislators' committee assignment which we merged to the survey data obtained from the GCS 2005. It is important to point out, that in contrast to Stratmann and Baur, we ignored deputy members in our analysis and only took regular committee members into account. There are a number of reasons supporting this strategy.

In case of their presence for example, only regular members are voting members in their committees and are thus able to use their membership to please their local constituency.

It is important to note that each legislator can be initially assigned to more than one committee which is particularly the case for members of small parties. We thus might have more than one observation per legislator in our final data set. We only took initial assignments into account (performed on 30 November 2005). The dependent variable is distributed as follows. Two-thirds of all observations are assignments in neutral committees, 22 percent in party committees and the remaining 12 percent in district committees.

Our analysis controls for the following four factors. We firstly control for the *mode of election*. This variable is of primary importance in Stratmann and Baur's (2002) analysis and thus needs to be controlled. About 58 percent of all our observations in the final data set are related to legislators elected in the nominal tier (coded as 1) while the rest of the observations are related to legislators elected in the list tier.

Another control is for the *winnability of districts*. We argued above that this could be a crucial incentive for individual legislators to push for a district committee assignment driven by the hope to win in future elections and to thus secure an independent electoral basis. We assume that candidates consider chances to win a particular district in the next election on the basis of the results of the previous elections in terms of the vote margin in the nominal-vote. We created a dummy variable and coded a district to be winnable (coded as 1) for a particular legislator if he

or she was a winner in 2005 in this district or lost this district by less than 10 percentage points.¹⁰ About half of all observations (51%) are related to legislators who ran in winnable districts.

Our third control is for *size of party*. Small parties should not care at all about the nominal vote. Consequently, Stratmann and Baur (2002) disregard them from their analysis. We agree that small party candidates do not have many chances to win nominal-tier seats, and thus would not care much about their nominal votes. More often than not they do not come even close. Localness should thus matter much more in smaller parties in the context of the committee assignment process. Consequently we add a dummy for small party (Greens, Left, FDP MPs are coded as 1) and expect to find in contrast to the literature building on Stramann and Bauer (2002) no difference between committee assignments of small and large parties. Thirty-one percent of our observations are related to legislators representing small parties.

Our last control variable concerns the question of whether a committee assignment represents a first-time assignment, or whether a legislator is returned to his or her old committee. We will control for *reassignments* by including a dummy variable that scores one if a particular legislator was assigned (again we do not count deputy membership) to the same committee at the end of the previous legislative term (until 2005). Twenty-two percent of all observations in the final data set represent reassignments. This control variable is important for the interpretation of our final results. Our hypotheses raise one obvious question that needs to be discussed at this point in our argument. The issue is that legislators might be assigned to district committees not

¹⁰ This is a frequently used assumption in the literature. A 10 per cent threshold to distinguish between safe and competitive districts is used e.g. by Turner (1953) or for the German case by Zittel and Gschwend (2007, 2008) and Schmitt and Wüst (2002). The New York Times uses this criterion, too, for electoral district predictions.

because of their degree of “localness”. Instead our independent variables might be a consequence of being assigned to a district committee. Legislators might run strong local campaigns because of their committee assignment and the ability to channel funds to their local reelection constituency. By controlling for reassignment, we can address this problem in the following way. If we find no effect of the reassignment variable than there is no difference between new assignments and reassignments to particular types of committees. Our indicators of “localness” should then be seen as causes rather than a consequence of the assignment choice.

The previous theoretical and empirical considerations lead us to the following hypotheses that we aim to test in the next section of the paper.

H1: MPs who raised large amounts of local (non-party) money in the most previous election should be more likely to receive a committee assignment which will enable them to please their local constituency

H2: MPs who mobilized a large number of individuals to serve in their campaign team should be more likely to receive a committee assignment which will enable them to please their local constituency

H3: MPs who spend large amounts of their individual time in the most previous election in local campaign contexts should be more likely to receive a committee assignment which will enable them to please their local constituency

H4: Legislators who place a strong emphasis on local aspects in their campaign should be more likely to receive a committee assignment which will enable them to please their local constituency.

Constituency Campaigns in 2005 and committee assignments in the 16th Bundestag

We distinguished in the previous section between three types of legislative committees: district, party and neutral committees. While we have a total of 199 cases (committee assignments that can be matched with data from the candidate study), a large majority of our observations (131) concerns seat assignments to one of the neutral committees; our second largest group with 43 observations, concerns assignments to one of the party committees; only about one in eight observations in our data set concerns district committee seats. Table 1 provides a quick bivariate overview of the relationship between the “localness” of legislators and the type of committees they were assigned to.

Table 1: The relationship of “localness” and committee type in bivariate perspective

Committee Types	N	Personal Campaign Effort	Local Campaign Budget [in €]	Mobilization Effort (log)	Local Emphasis
Neutral Committee	131	.46	15871	2.21	.49
Party Committee	43	.46	18093	2.39	.42
District Committee	25	.53	9929	2.20	.54

Note. Cell entries are mean values

Table 1 supports our theoretical expectations in a twofold way. It firstly demonstrates that members of district committees spent on average slightly more time on local campaign activities than their counterparts in party or neutral committees. The bivariate relationships between the emphasis of the candidates’ campaigns and their committee assignments secondly points into a

similar direction. We find the highest average values on this composite measure among those legislators who were assigned to district committees followed by neutral and, finally, party committees.

Table 1 however also contains some surprising news from the perspective of our theoretical expectations. It shows that legislators assigned to party committees are most successful in raising non-party funding compared to legislators assigned to district and neutral committees. They secured on average of about 18k€ while legislators assigned to district committees get less than 10k€ of donations and private funds. Members of neutral committees get on average almost 16k€. The bivariate results on the mobilization effort point into a similar unexpected direction. Table 1 shows that those legislators assigned to party committees had the largest local campaign team (between 13 and 14 people on the raw scale) while district committee members come in second (between 11 and 12 on the raw scale) and neutral members third (between 10 and 11 on the raw scale). Because a fourth of our observations belong to a legislator with a campaign team that is larger than 20 we take the log of the absolute head count as our measure of mobilization effort indicated by the size of the local campaign team.

We would like to see in the following analysis to what degree our four indicators of “localness” as well as our various control variables are able to predict committee assignments in the 16th Bundestag. We therefore estimate a multinomial logit (MNL) model of committee assignment based on the independent variables introduced above. The level of analysis is the type of committee seat: ordinary, deputy and actual chairperson. The standard errors are clustered by the individual legislator because some MPs are initially assigned to more than one committee. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Predicting Initial Committee Assignment: A MNL Choice Model for MPs of the 16th German Bundestag

	Neutral vs. Party	District vs. Party
Local Campaign Budget	-0.0236 (0.0160)	-0.103** (0.0403)
Mobilization Effort	-0.277 (0.291)	-0.273 (0.534)
Personal Campaign Effort	0.381 (1.378)	3.714** (1.540)
Local Emphasis	2.431** (1.029)	2.997** (1.297)
Modus of election (1 = electoral district)	1.255* (0.679)	2.451* (1.320)
Winnability (1 = high)	0.444 (0.702)	-1.096 (1.221)
Reassignment	0.280 (0.472)	-0.518 (0.639)
Size of Party (1 = Small Party)	1.026* (0.575)	0.544 (0.849)
Constant	0.161 (0.985)	-1.800 (1.705)
Pseudo R2	0.109	
No. of cluster	138	
N	199	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$

We distinguish two sets of estimates in Table 2. The first set of estimates on the left relates to the probability of being assigned to a neutral versus a party committee. We are much more interested in the second set of estimates that distinguish committee assignment between district and party committees. The results shown in Table 2 demonstrate that localness as shown in legislators' campaign behavior in the previous election does have some systematic impact on their committee assignments. The more legislators made an effort to personally campaign in local contexts in 2005 the more likely it was that they were assigned to a district rather than a party committee. Moreover, legislators who emphasized their "localness" in their previous constituency campaign were more likely to be assigned to a party committee, and at the same time more likely to be either assigned to a neutral or a district committee. These results are consistent with our theoretical expectations that spending time on local campaign activities as well as emphasizing "localness" in campaign communication signals legislators' local focus to their parties and thus affects their committee assignment.

Table 2 does not demonstrate any effect of the legislators' local mobilization efforts in the 2005 campaign on their committee assignment. It might very well be that the sheer size of the local campaign team does not provide a clear enough signal for their mobilization effort due to contextual factors. For instance, a campaign team of 10 people supporting a left-wing social democrat in an electoral district that encloses a university campuses signals a different mobilization effort than the same sized campaign team in, say, a rural area with many elderly voters.

Table 2 furthermore shows an effect of the size of the local campaign budget on committee assignments that points against the expected direction. The results indicate somewhat unexpectedly that those legislators that were able to secure a larger amount of non-party money

were more likely to be placed on a party committees rather than district committees. We can only speculate that those with a large party independent campaign budget were more prominent political figures nationally. Presumably, their large local budget is not a result of being a good fit to the local reelection constituency but rather caused by their prominence nationally. Currently we have no data available to test this any further.

In terms of mode of election we are able to replicate the findings of Stratmann and Baur (2002). Legislators that are elected through the list-vote are more likely to being assigned to a party committee as opposed to a district or neutral committee. For legislators who won their electoral district we get the reverse picture. They are predicted to be more likely to sit in either a district or a neutral committee.

These finding apparently hold not only for legislators for large parties, as Stratmann and Baur (2002) wants us to believe, but also for small party legislators. This further suggests that that “localness” is conceptually different from mode of election because it appears to be an important determinant of committee assignment for legislators of large as well as small parties. The fact that small party legislators are more likely to be assigned to neutral as opposed to party committees might be entirely a result of the fact that small party legislators are typically assigned to more committee seats than large party legislators because large parties need to fill more committee seats in the legislature.

The non-significance of the reassignment dummy supports our case even further in that it is consistent with the idea that our independent variables based on the reported campaign behavior *before* the election in 2005 are in fact causally prior to the committee seat assignment process *after* the election instead of being determined by it or by the previous assignment process in the past legislative term (between the previous election in 2002 and 2005).

Conclusion and discussion

Our paper advances the notion that “localness” matters for the committee assignments of legislators in Germany’s mixed-member electoral system and that “localness” is independent from the mode of election. We operationalize “localness” via the campaign behavior of legislators’ in their previous constituency campaigns and find some empirical support for our assumption. Legislators who campaigned most intensively in local arenas and who gave their campaign a local emphasis--for example, by stressing their local identity or their willingness to care for the economic well being of their district--are more likely to being assigned to district-focused committees, independent of their mode of election.

Not all of our four indicators measuring “localness” support our argument. We did not find any affect on committee assignments on candidates’ mobilization effort at the local level, at least not with our measure (the size of the local campaign team). In addition, the size of the campaign budget flowing from non-party sources turned out to stand in a reverse relationship to committee assignments from what we expected. The likelihood of being assigned to a district committee increased with the amount of non-party money legislators raised in the previous election campaign. However, we believe that these observations do not contradict our general argument. It rather suggests that “localness” matters in a differentiated way to the committee assignment process within a party driven legislature. Our findings could suggest that parties aim to optimize several contradictory goals in the process of assigning committee seats rather than to maximize “localness”.

Our findings could mean specifically that committee assignments are used as mechanisms to prevent “good” locals from turning into “bad” locals, and to keep the “bad locals” at bay. Mixed-member systems pose inherent risks to cohesive political parties. Our initial

assumption was that parties are interested in obtaining spillover (or “contamination”) benefits on their list vote by running candidates in the nominal tier who have a strong local focus. This assumption however also implies the need to keep constituency candidates from “going native” and posing challenges to party unity. Constituency candidates with a strong local focus could become too close to their local constituencies and thus become a challenge to party unity. Promoting fierce “local heroes” to constituency committees could augment this risk. Our findings, which must be regarded as preliminary, suggest that parties are aware of these risks in the committee assignment process. On the one hand, our evidence suggests that parties strategically assign to district committees those legislators who pay utmost attention to their local constituents in their campaigns. On the other hand, parties desire legislators who keep close ties with their party; perhaps those who are predominantly financed via party funds are able to reassure their parties of the existence of these very ties.

Electoral incentives are not the only incentives structuring committee assignment processes! Studying them in isolation as a factor in this process is nevertheless important in mixed-member systems because they should have larger systemic implications, for instance with regard to public policies. If parties assign legislators based on “localness,” the likelihood of using the “pork barrel” increases significantly, as legislators who sit on district-focused committees use their influence in the legislative process to direct benefits to the local areas to which they are tied. Studying the impact of electoral incentives on the committee assignment process is also important with regard to the politics of democratic systems. If the politics of committee assignments follow electoral incentives, legislators with a strong local focus will constantly raise challenges for the cohesion of parliamentary parties which need to be actively managed by the party leadership. Because of these crucial ramifications for the larger policy process, it is most

important to keep a close eye on the committee assignment process in mixed-member systems and the impact of the electoral incentive on this process.

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